



April 17, 2007

H.R. 886 - Wild Sky Wilderness Act of 2007

Floor Situation

H.R. 886 is being considered on the floor under suspension of the rules and will require a two-thirds majority vote for passage. This legislation was introduced by Representative Rick Larsen (D-WA) on February 7, 2007. The bill was ordered to be reported from the Committee on Natural Resources, by voice vote, on March 7, 2007.

H.R. 886 is expected to be considered on the floor on April 17, 2007.

Summary

H.R. 886 designates roughly 106,000 acres in the Skykomish River valley, Washington, as the Wild Sky Wilderness. The Wild Sky Wilderness will be managed by the Secretary of Agriculture ("the Secretary") in accordance with the Wilderness Act, and the Secretary may manage this area as a comprehensive part of the larger complex of adjacent and nearby wilderness areas.

Pursuant to the bill, the Secretary must establish a trail plan for Forest Service lands in order to develop:

- A system of hiking and equestrian trails within the wilderness designated by this act; and,
- A system of trails adjacent to or to provide access to the wilderness designated by this act.

The bill authorizes the Secretary to use helicopters to construct and maintain a joint Forest Service and Snohomish County telecommunications repeater site. This site is intended to improve communications for safety, health, and emergency services.

The Secretary is authorized to acquire lands and interests in the Wild Sky Wilderness by purchase, donation, or exchange, and must give priority consideration to lands identified as "Priority Acquisition Lands." The boundaries of Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest and the Wild Sky Wilderness are to be adjusted if such lands are acquired.

H.R. 886 requires the Secretary to accept approximately 371 acres of land in the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest from the Chelan County Public Utility District if the District offers the land within 90 days of enactment of this act. In exchange for this land, the Secretary must convey to the District a permanent easement, including helicopter access, to maintain an existing telemetry site to monitor snow pack on 1.82 acres of land on the Wenatchee National Forest in the State of Washington.

However, if the District determines that there is no longer a need to maintain a telemetry site, the Secretary will be notified in writing and the easement will be extinguished and all rights conveyed by this exchange will revert to the United States.

Background

During the 107th, 108th, and 109th Congresses, the Wild Sky Wilderness Act was introduced in the House of Representatives and the Senate. In the 107th, 108th, and 109th Congresses, the Senate passed the bill by unanimous consent, while the full House took no action on the bill.

Presently, almost 42% of the Wild Sky area is congressionally designated Wilderness. During the last U.S. Forest Service wilderness evaluation in 1990, approximately 33,000 acres of the proposed 106,000 acres was identified as suitable for wilderness. In 2003, the U.S. Forest Service testified that 90,000 acres of the proposed area would be appropriate for wilderness. It also concluded that 16,000 acres were not well-suited for wilderness because it included previously harvested and roaded areas, private land (some with patented mining claims that would be acquired by the Forest Service under HR 886), and vital access roads.

**Note: Six Republican Members of the Committee on Natural Resources filed dissenting views of H.R. 886 in the Committee Report, including Ranking Member Don Young (R-AK).*

Cost

CBO estimates that implementing H.R. 886 would cost \$19 million over the 2008-2012 period, assuming appropriation of the necessary amounts. Enacting this legislation could affect offsetting receipts and direct spending, but we estimate that any such effects would be negligible. Enacting the bill would not affect revenues.

Staff Contact

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